

News from the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services



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Opinion/Editorial (650 words)

“Climate change gives new mission to Earth Day”

Thomas S. Burack, Department of Environmental Services Commissioner

Having spent much of my childhood in Jackson in the heart of the Presidential Mountain Range, the breathtaking beauty of our state’s natural resources is etched on my mind. My lasting memories, not unlike those of others who grew up here in New Hampshire, are of time spent in the outdoors enjoying nature. My wife and I are now enjoying sharing this reverence for the natural world with our young children, from hiking Pitcher Mountain in Stoddard, combing the beaches at Odiorne State Park in Rye, or skiing down the slopes of Black Mountain in Jackson. As another Earth Day approaches, I aspire to ensure that my grandchildren, like my children, will have similar memories. Such a goal should be shared by us all, including the burden of achieving this goal.

While great strides have been made in environmental cleanup and protection since the first Earth Day 37 years ago, we must confront the stark reality that humankind faces perhaps the greatest threat to our environment yet – climate change caused by human activities. It is difficult these days to watch the news or read a newspaper without seeing something about climate change and the effect it is having upon our planet and our daily lives. We have all seen reports of rising annual temperatures, severe weather events, threats to our food and water supplies, rising sea levels, glacial melting, the endangerment of thousands of plant and animal species and the spread of deadly diseases.

The good news is that the world now recognizes that there is a problem. Governments across the globe are now taking action to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, which trap the sun’s heat within the Earth’s atmosphere and thereby contribute to global warming. These government led initiatives will take time to implement, but each of us can do something right now to reduce our own impact on the Earth’s climate. If enough of us took a handful of meaningful actions in our daily lives to conserve energy, we could collectively reduce our nation’s greenhouse gas emissions below levels set forth in global climate treaties, such as the Kyoto Protocol. What’s more, these simple steps would save us all money on our electric, home heating, and vehicle fuel bills.

Here is a short list of ways you can make a difference and save money right now.

1. Change a light bulb. Save electricity by replacing ordinary light bulbs in your house with compact fluorescent bulbs.
2. Keep recycling. It takes less energy to make products from recycled materials than from virgin materials.
3. Turn it off. Save energy by turning off lights and electric devices, such as televisions and computers, when you leave a room. Better yet, use a power strip to control these devices.

4. Drive smart. Carpool, drive less, combine errands, buy a hybrid vehicle, reduce idling, ensure that your tires are properly inflated and your engine is serviced regularly – these all reduce the amount of gasoline you will need to purchase.
5. Use less water. Only run your dishwasher when full; use cold water to wash your clothes; and turn the water off when brushing your teeth. All of these save water and reduce heating costs.
6. Buy Local. On average, produce travels 1,500 miles to reach grocery store shelves. Reduce transportation impacts by buying from local growers.
7. Plant a tree. A single tree will absorb one ton of carbon dioxide over its lifetime.
8. Plug the leaks. Weatherize your house by weather-stripping around drafty windows and doors to save on heating costs.

We each have a role in protecting our environment. Please make a pledge to yourself this Earth Day to be part of the solution. Then act on this pledge to leave a better world for your children and grandchildren. Together we can all make a tremendous difference.

Thomas S. Burack, NHDES Commissioner

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